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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 VILNIUS 000326

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/NB AND EUR/RUS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREF](#) [LH](#) [RS](#)

SUBJECT: RUSSIAN ENVOY'S SHARPE TONGUE AND THREATS TO CUT OFF ENERGY INFLAME BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP

REF: A. VILNIUS 52

- [¶B. VILNIUS 104](#)
- [¶C. VILNIUS 174](#)
- [¶D. VILNIUS 219](#)
- [¶E. VILNIUS 231](#)

Classified By: Pol/Econ Officer Gregory Bernsteen for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

**¶11. (C) SUMMARY:** Russia's envoy to Lithuania has provoked high-level outrage and calls for his expulsion with sharp-tongued criticism of Lithuanians and thinly veiled threats to interrupt the country's energy supplies. Most local analysts believe the Russian's sudden high-profile gibes - after 18 months of relative obscurity on the job - reflect Russian pique at Lithuanian President Adamkus's refusal to participate in World War II commemorative events in Moscow on May 9, and aim to portray Lithuania to its western partners as unduly provocative to Russia. Others ascribe the outbursts to the Russian's mercurial temperament and maintain that bilateral relations are fine. It remains to be seen whether Lithuania will play along with the former scenario and ratchet up tensions more by expelling Tsepov.  
END SUMMARY.

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A Rising Tension  
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**¶12. (U)** Russian Ambassador Boris Tsepov in a front page interview in Lithuania's second-largest newspaper "Respublika" on March 24:

--Sharply criticized Lithuania as "not a country, but a den of scandalmongers," where "everyone is dirty ... and happy that none is clean."

--Contended that "anti-Russian spice is everywhere, and Russians are blamed for everything."

--Noted Lithuania's precarious dependence on Russian energy resources and warned that Russia could sell to whomever it pleases.

--Scoffed that Lithuania behaves immaturely, and sees the hand of Moscow and the KGB everywhere.

**¶13. (U)** The Tsepov interview prompted a firestorm of criticism:

--President Adamkus stated that Tsepov's comments were "not fully in line with diplomatic ethics." The President's foreign policy advisor Edminas Bagdonas said Tsepov had gone "over the top."

--Speaker of the Parliament Arturas Paulauskas said that the comments "do nothing to improve our relations."

--Prime Minister Algirdas Brazauskas remarked, "He is Russia's official, not ours, so let Russia assess him."

-- Foreign Minister Valionis and others in the MFA have publicly questioned whether Tsepov's statements require him to depart. MFA Undersecretary Albinas Januska commented that he did not see how the Russian diplomat could continue his work in Lithuania.

The interview also jammed Lithuania's heavily politicized internet chat rooms with hundreds of comments, some agreeing with Tsepov's charges, but many calling for Tsepov's immediate expulsion.

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A Worsening Climate  
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**¶14. (U)** The storm surrounding Tsepov's interview is the latest in a series of incidents bedeviling Lithuanian-Russian relations in the wake of Adamkus's March 7 decision to miss the May 9 festivities in Moscow:

-- A Russian radio station requested entry permits for twelve journalists, more than any local radio staff. (Lithuania

approved four.)

-- Lithuania's Education Ministry has raised concerns about allegedly unlicensed private police training facilities under Russian ownership operating in Lithuania. The media insinuated that these academies, which turn out hundreds of graduates annually, may be a Russian mechanism to obtain influence.

-- Seimas Speaker Arturas Paulauskas publicly accused Russian diplomats of attempts to gain information about Lithuania's political processes and the official decision-making about Lithuanian attendance at the May 9th celebrations in Moscow from members of parliament. Officials, including opposition leader and Conservative Party member Andrius Kubilius and the State Security Department, characterized Paulauskas' remarks as overwrought, but the press insinuated parallels between the diplomats in question and certain of their colleagues whom Lithuania expelled for inappropriate behavior. (NOTE: Lithuania expelled three Russian diplomats last year, and nine during the last two years.)

-- Tsepov described Lithuania's leading daily as "yellow press" and called the editor "uncivilized" after journalists taunted him for failing to anticipate Adamkus's decision not to attend the May 9 events. Foreign Minister Valionis sharply and publicly rebuked Tsepov's criticism of the newspaper, telling him to worry more about press freedom in Russia and threatening further expulsions of Russian diplomats.

-- Russian Foreign Ministry's website said that Sergei Lavrov had chastised FM Valionis for Adamkus's refusal to travel to Moscow for May 9. Valionis disputed this interpretation and maintains that the conversation was cordial, and the offending report soon disappeared from the website.

**15.** (U) These episodes occurred against the backdrop of a revelation of a list of pre-independence Lithuanian KGB reservists and the subsequent parliamentary investigation of three public figures on the list, including Foreign Minister Valionis and the head of the National Security Service (VSD)(refs A and B). The publicity surrounding the parliamentary conclusions raised questions about Russian influence on Lithuania's political process. Although Parliament (Seimas) accepted the commission's findings that the FM and Security chief had not collaborated with the KGB, one parliamentarian, Petras Grazulis, has begun a hunger strike, demanding the FM and VSD chief resign.

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Provocation by Design?  
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**16.** (C) Many analysts believe Tsepov's anti-Lithuanian broadsides reflect a calculated Russian campaign to provoke an intemperate Lithuanian response. The Prime Minister's foreign affairs advisor, Darijus Pranckevicius, told us that there was no doubt that the Ambassador Tsepov was acting under instruction to increase pressure on Lithuania following Adamkus's decision not to go to Moscow for the May 9 celebrations. He further suggested the Russians aim to show Lithuania and the other Baltic countries in their worst light and to test how far they can push Lithuania before provoking a strong reaction.

**17.** (C) Others ascribe Tsepov's provocative outbursts as more in keeping with his own personal volatility. (Note: Tsepov is known on the local diplomatic circuit for emotional outbursts. End Note.) The head of the Russia Division at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Arunas Vinciunas told us that he does not see an overarching, Moscow-directed strategy behind Ambassador Tsepov's recent comments. He described the ambassador as "arrogant and prone to stupid comments," and proffered the theory that the ambassador expects Moscow to recall him shortly, and is speaking out of frustration. Vinciunis mentioned that he has good working-level relations with Russian officials, with the example that in three hours of meetings today with Russian diplomats, the topic of the Ambassador's comments did not come up. He predicts that after May 9, much of the current tension will ease.

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Comment: More to Come, Unfortunately  
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**18.** (C) Concerns that Lithuania-Russia relations would deteriorate once Adamkus refused to attend the May 9th ceremonies in Moscow are proving accurate. Moscow appears to be engaging in a calculated barrage to damage the credibility of the Baltics, Lithuania in particular. Lithuania's dormant anger against the Soviet occupation and constant undercurrent of worry about Russia's influence makes them a willing foil. While there is also a current of pragmatism in Lithuania's relationship with Russia (ref C), it seems likely that the GOL's ultimate reaction to Tsepov's tirade will go beyond

rhetorical denunciations - we wait to see how far.  
Mull